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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002337

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN AND EUR/SNEC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: DIASPORA ORGANIZATION INCREASES SUPPORT FOR N-K  
"REPOPULATION PROGRAM"

REF: USUN NEW YORK 2328

Classified By: CDA A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is increasing its efforts to support ongoing Armenian government-sponsored repopulation programs in Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) through its "Centennial Project." The AGBU, the Armenian Diaspora NGO with the largest membership worldwide, has reportedly already transferred forty new homes and a new elementary school in the N-K village of Norashen to the N-K authorities with plans to expand the program to include eight more villages around Stepanakert in the upcoming year. AGBU sources told us October 18 that their recent Worldwide Congress (a bi-annual Board of Trustees meeting) produced so much excitement for the project that local chapters in Europe and South America have removed themselves from the AGBU's central financing in order to dedicate more resources (upwards of USD 5 million per country in some cases) to the project. End Summary.

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PROJECT TO MAKE N-K A "MORE ATTRACTIVE PERMANENT ADDRESS"  
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2. (SBU) The Armenian General Benevolent Union is increasing its efforts to support ongoing Armenian government-sponsored repopulation programs in Nagorno-Karabakh through its "Centennial Project." The project includes a large-scale rebuilding program (single-family homes, schools and community centers) in villages surrounding Stepanakert. The project is being coordinated closely with local N-K authorities and GOAM representatives as part of the ongoing incentive program to attract Armenians to re-settle portions of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to AGBU sources, the initial villages are part of a list of "artificially Azeri-populated" areas within N-K with relatively small populations. According to the AGBU, some within the N-K leadership view these villages as "liabilities" in proving their case that N-K is a wholly Armenian territory. While the Embassy cannot confirm the reports, GOAM and AGBU sources claim that there are no plans to fund re-building projects in the occupied territories outside of N-K. The Centennial Project chose the village of Norashen (east of Stepanakert) as the pilot site for the re-building program. The next phase of the project will include building programs in the Hadrut and Martakert regions of N-K.

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ENTHUSIASTIC BOARD CHIPS IN LOCAL OPERATING BUDGETS  
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3. (C) AGBU sources told us October 18 that their recent worldwide Congress (a bi-annual Board of Trustees meeting held this year in Yerevan and N-K) produced considerable excitement for the project. N-K "President" Arkady Ghukasian praised the initiative during his keynote address to over 300 AGBU conference participants during a widely-publicized inaugural event in Yerevan. Local chapters in Europe and South America, upon seeing the initial results of the project, offered to remove themselves from the AGBU's central financing for the upcoming year in order to dedicate their operating budgets to the Centennial Project. This contribution could mean a USD 5 million increase in the cases of larger chapters in Brazil, France and the United Kingdom. French-Armenian Leon Kabandjian conceived the project in 2002 as a way to systematically mobilize support for N-K in the wake of "dying interest" on the part of Diaspora Groups. His efforts in France garnered sizable donations from AGBU donors in Paris and, according to rumors within the AGBU's ranks, spurred a funding race between chapters in France and England. Donations from the London chapter will serve as the basis for the next tranche of Centennial Project funding.

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COMMENT  
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4. (C) The excitement surrounding the Centennial Project is

the first big news about Diaspora initiatives in N-K to circulate in Yerevan over the past year. The news coincides with the new level of political interest in N-K resettlement issues resulting from ongoing discussions in at UNGA (ref). Perhaps more important than the AGBU's decision to move from traditional humanitarian response into infrastructure development is the accompanying discussion of re-invigorating Diaspora involvement in N-K. We will be paying close attention to comments coming out of Yerevan and Stepanakert as the next phase of the Centennial Project gets underway.

GODFREY